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LMDA New & Noteworthy, volume 3, no. 1

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Authors

Raquel Almazan, Jenna Turk, Maegan Clearwood, Jack Spagnola, Diep Tran, and Gabriella Steinberg

A dark blue banner with a pattern of small, light-colored triangles. In the center, the text "LMDA NEW & NOTEWORTHY" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, enclosed within a thin white rectangular border.

LMDA NEW & NOTEWORTHY

October 2017

Vol. 3, No. 1

In this issue:

- read **interviews with 2 dramaturgs** about their current projects
 - find out what **theatre journalist Diep Tran** has to say about the overlap between dramaturgy and journalism re: shaping the stories we tell and embracing activism
 - see what **upcoming LMDA activities** are happening in your region
-

RAQUEL ALMAZAN

Dramaturg / Playwright / Producer

La Lucha Arts

NYC-based Raquel Almazan is a multifaceted artist dedicated to developing new work through her company, [La Lucha Arts](#). LMDA spoke her about how dramaturgy and activist impulses drive her current projects.



As a dramaturg who is also a writer and performer, how does your dramaturgical practice inform your own artistic practice?

My multi-disciplinary background has infused in me a deep compassion for playwrights, for the battle to make theatre, and for underrepresented artists. I often connect specific visual art, music, dance, social movements, political theories, and cultural practices to a playwright I'm working with and explore how that informs or expands the play. I'm rooted in the approach that plays are living worlds that need to be supported by multi-dimensional elements.

Can you tell us about a project you are currently working on?

I am currently in the beginning stages of a residency (Scratch Lab) at Hi-ARTS in NYC, for the play LA NEGRA, part of the LATIN IS AMERICA play cycle.

The LATIN IS AMERICA play cycle, is a bi-lingual cycle of plays that will ultimately have 33 parts, one for each of the countries and dependencies in Latin America. I intend for my plays to respond to the growing Latin American presence in America and to serve a generation of Latinx people who are going to redefine America.

This opportunity to develop the play was a clear sign for me to create a sacred space. There are fewer and fewer places where we can honor our dead, and since this piece is dedicated to the living and the dead of Mexico, I am collaborating with visual artist Benjamin Rojas who builds ofrendas (altars) to the dead. This act of building an ofrenda then informed director Fernando Parra Borti to create a live installation of the characters via stations placed in the space.

You also consider yourself an activist artist, so I want to ask: given the current state of the world, how are you coping?

I constantly have to prove that I'm as smart and capable as my white counterparts in the industry. While I had pieces of my past where I have been in more overt struggles in this country, I have never felt more attacked then I do now under the Trump administration because the administration is overtly attacking women, immigrants, and artists.

I'm not certain what it means anymore to be American. When people ask me where I'm from, I immediately state my parents' heritage because that's what I feel I am connected to in my soul. My body is functioning in the system that is called the United States of America, but I don't fully feel American because I don't feel I have all the rights that the average white American would have. I'm an American citizen. I have contributed to this society as an educator, as an artist and activist. I do constantly struggle with what it means to be in this country under the conditions of inequity.

What can dramaturgs really do to help others – and themselves?

As a dramaturg and writer, I collaborate and invite people and communities impacted by the conditions reflected in the work. Youth, sex workers, the undocumented, homeless, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated have often been my dramaturgical collaborators. The closer we are to those actual experiences, the more we ensure that the perspective is not from the outside. It's necessary to empower impacted people with that agency to shape their futures by shaping narrative. This comes back to intention and how the play seeks to help disrupt, encourage, cultivate, and or heal people.

Interview by Jenna Turk

MAEGAN CLEARWOOD

Literary Associate,

The O'Neill Theater Center

Meagen Clearwood talks about collaborating with playwrights and the summer at The O'Neill.



What is your favorite part of being in a rehearsal room?

Being useful in unexpected ways. I love to provide insight into an aspect of the world of the play that's otherwise been left untouched, or finding a unique angle from which to approach a conversation. I love subverting people's expectations about what a dramaturg can offer -- particularly the stereotype that dramaturgs surround themselves with books and spout facts all day -- by asking more questions instead of answering them. I'm also a weirdo and have a strange fondness for post-show conversations with patrons, because it's such a challenging rewiring of my brain, and the consequences of a poorly moderated discussion can be so disastrous -- the high stakes are kind of exhilarating.

What are some of the best experiences you've had with working collaboratively with a playwright?

By far the best collaboration I've had with a playwright was with Jonelle Walker on *TAME*. at WSC Avant Bard in Arlington, VA, as well as with our incomparable director, Angela Kay Pirko. I discovered the play two years prior to our producing it, at the Washington DC Fringe Festival, and advocated to include in Avant Bard's Script in Play Reading Series when I joined their team as Resident Dramaturg. The play stuck with me in a profound, visceral way, and I had the honor of seeing (and then fostering) its growth from its early Fringe days to its staged reading to its premiere. It was by far the most heartfelt playwright-director-dramaturg trio I've ever been a part of, and my role on the project forced me to use all of my dramaturgical skillsets, from early script conversations and revision tracking to community engagement and making a lobby display. The experience also holds a special place in my heart because we opened the night before election day; the play, which is a searing and beautiful reexamination of *Taming of the Shrew* from the perspective of a lesbian poet in 1960s Texas, struck a wildly different tone after the results of the election, and I had the challenge of reframing conversations around the story to ensure that we were fostering a healthy, meaningful dialogue around themes of gender, violence, and sexuality -- for our audience as well as our actors.

The O'Neill gets so many submissions for their various conferences, how does the literary office keep everything organized?

We have such a rich history of artistic and developmental support, so the Literary Office doesn't have to reinvent the wheel each season; we simply facilitate the processes and improve upon what we already know. We have an incredible script revision process that we use for our National Playwrights Conference, for example, and after we put our interns through an thorough training process, it's just a matter of implementing that strategy to be its best version for each artist's process. We use a variety of different programs for our different application processes, and they range from Google forms and sheets to a FileMaker database.

The O'Neill Theater Center has so much going on over the summer. For some of our readers who haven't been there, what's it like?

It is a nonstop stream of artistic fervor. With more than six developmental conferences over the course of a few months, we have artists joining campus nearly every day, so no matter how exhausted you are from a late night at the Pub or adventure at the beach, there's always fresh energy on campus to reboot your spirit. As incredible as a summer at the O'Neill is, it always feels like you're entering the Twilight Zone; the sheer amount of things happening on campus makes a day feel like a year, and artists come and go so quickly that days of the week become a blur, until it's suddenly August and even the Cabaret Fellows are gone. It's surreal, but there's a reason artists call it a magical place.

Interview by Jack Spagnola



DIEP TRAN

Associate Editor,
American Theatre Magazine

Diep Tran writes on everything regarding the theatre industry from performance analysis/critiquing, to reporting on issues like representation and financial inequities. She talks here about her work in this current political climate and her commitment to inclusivity.

What moves you to pursue a story?

What interests me are stories that tie theatre to the greater world around us – socially or politically, or environmentally. I will cover any play

that I can under these categories because I appreciate what they're trying to do, which is to tie theatre into the wider world and to become part of the cultural conversation. I don't think the industry operates in a bubble, and art is not created in a bubble, so if I as a journalist make that connection for readers, then hopefully that will make this artform more interesting to people who may not be inclined to step into the room with it. I'm also really interested in the nuts and bolts of how theatre is made (i.e. compensation issues in our industry). There's this glamorous veneer on top of the entertainment industry so I always love to pull back the curtain and reveal its gears and even its ugliness. That's what interests me as a writer: complexity.

You moderated a panel with LMDA entitled “Reviewing the Situation: Producing Theatre and Cultural Awareness.” What was the experience of talking about these issues with dramaturgs?

I find dramaturgy and journalism to be quite similar. There is a tendency to ask questions and go further under the surface on themes and ideas in the work that may be unseen initially. And when talking to dramaturgs about these issues of representation (the panel was in response to Encores! production of *Big River* regarding questions of relevance in less PC work) there's an openness to have this conversation because you're used to questioning things. There's a desire to grapple with uncomfortable questions. Not everyone is going to agree with us, but the best we can do is come together in mutual respect as we raise visibility in these issues.

How do you think your work changed in the wake of our current political situation?

I've gotten less self-conscious about my opinion and the things I choose to say. I used to temper my writing because theatre journalism's audience used to be predominantly white, so I needed to make my ideas palatable in a certain way. But after the election, I feel a certain fearlessness and a need to not censor myself, and to say that we cannot wait 5 years or 10 years for equitable representation, that it must happen now. Now is the time of activism, and many people are trying their best to advocate for change, and I'm trying to do that by making our little industry a little more inclusive, and by pushing it to tell more stories of different people and through that, to help audiences see the humanity in those who are different from them.

Recently you made a source-list for female theatre journalists. What advice would you give dramaturgs looking to venture into theatre journalism?

Don't do this for free tickets. And always ask to get paid for your work. Unfortunately, job security and opportunities are incredibly low, and aspiring theatre journalists/critics will work for no money for a long time. While you're in the trenches of it, find why you want to do this, and why telling stories is important to you. The pieces that I've written that have the most traction online are pieces that grapple with the most uncomfortable questions – race, sex, gender, class, etc. As journalists, you can write the preview piece, but you also shouldn't be afraid to ask the tough questions about the industry, and to challenge your readers. Just because you write about the arts doesn't mean that the arts are frivolous. The other thing that's quite fortunate about writing today is that anyone can build a following online. So get on Twitter! And then in terms of where it's going; I honestly don't know - there are so many voices producing articles of note, but there are so few full-time positions that I don't know how we can sustain emerging writers. The only way to stay in journalism is if you're adequately compensated. Theatre criticism cannot stay a hobby forever – that's unreasonable to ask for anyone! Get back to me in another 5 years!

Interview by Gabriella Steinberg

events / announcements

October 11 / REGIONAL - NORTHEAST: LMDA Happy Hour, 5:30-6:30pm at The Beehive's lower level bar, 541 Tremont St, Boston. Join Regional VP Jessie Baxter, and participants and staff from [Company One Theatre's PlayLab Bootcamp](#), for snacks and socializing before heading next door for a sneak peek at the workshop of a new play by C1's Mellon Foundation Resident Playwright, Kirsten Greenidge! RSVP [here](#).

** Special offer for LMDA members interested in PlayLab Bootcamp: Use the code **LMDA50** for \$50 off artist track registration and **LMDA25** for up to 3 a la carte sessions at \$25/each. For info and registration, click [here](#)

October 16 / NEW MEMBER PROGRAM: LMDA's first "Case study and conversation" conference call, with guest facilitator Anne Morgan, at 2pm ET. For more information and to RSVP, click [here](#).

October 16 / REGIONAL - SOUTHWEST: LMDA Happy Hour, 5:30pm at [Smoke House](#) in Burbank. An informal gathering with Los Angeles-area dramaturgs to see old friends, make some new ones, and talk shop. Open to members and non-members alike. Members: LMDA will buy your first round! To RSVP, email Kate Langsdorf at southwest@lmda.org.

October 23 / REGIONAL - METRO CHICAGO: LMDA & Dramatists Guild will hold their 3rd annual Chicago meet-up at 7pm at TimeLine Theatre, 615 W Wellington Ave, Chicago, IL 60657. The location is wheelchair accessible. A short panel will be followed by an activity matching dramaturgs/literary managers with playwrights to get feedback on their synopses; the event concludes with a mixer. This event will also relaunch the Chicago Dramaturgy Open Office Hours Project. If you'd like to contact Regional VP Maren Robinson to volunteer to help or share ideas, her email is: metrochicago@lmda.org.

October 25 / REGIONAL - METRO NYC: LMDA Happy Hour, 7-8:30pm at the Signature Theatre Bar. Join us for a drink, and to discuss reflections on the 2017 Conference, share personal dramaturgical updates, brainstorm goals for LMDA in the coming season. Contact Regional VP Rachel Abrams with any questions at metronyc@lmda.org.

October 25 / REGIONAL - PLAINS: Online Happy Hour, 8:30-9:30pm (CT)/7:30-8:30 (ET). Join dramaturgs from your region to toast our successes, brainstorm solutions to our challenges, meet new people, and engage in resource sharing! We'll also discuss what LMDA can help support you and your work in the 2017-18 season. Open to members and prospective members. Bring a your favorite drink and join us on Zoom*, our new professional meeting and networking site. Questions? Reach out to Jacqueline Goldfinger, regional@lmda.org.

October 26 / REGIONAL - SOUTHEAST: Online Happy Hour, 7:30-8:30pm (ET). Join dramaturgs from your region to toast our successes, brainstorm solutions to our challenges, meet new people, and engage in resource sharing! We'll also discuss what LMDA can help support you and your work in the 2017-18 season. Open to members and prospective members. Bring a your favorite drink and join us on Zoom*, our new professional meeting and networking site. Questions? Reach out to Jacqueline Goldfinger, regional@lmda.org.

October 27 / GRANTS + AWARDS: deadline for Elliott Hayes Award [applications](#).

NOVEMBER 2 / REGIONAL - METRO PHILADELPHIA: LMDA Happy Hour at 5pm, at Tria (12th and Spruce) in Center City, Philadelphia. It will be an opportunity to network and discuss the upcoming season's Dramaturgy Open Office Hours Project and any other topics of interest. If you'd like to volunteer or share ideas, contact Regional VP Meghan Winch metrophilly@lmda.org.

NOVEMBER 15 / REGIONAL - GREATER MIDWEST: Online Happy Hour, 8:30-9:30pm (CT)/7:30-8:30 (ET). Join dramaturgs from your region to toast our successes, brainstorm solutions to our challenges, meet new people, and engage in resource sharing! We'll also discuss what LMDA can help support you and your work in the 2017-18 season. Open to members and prospective members. Bring a your favorite drink and join us on Zoom*, our new professional meeting and networking site. Questions? Reach out to Jacqueline Goldfinger, regional@lmda.org.

NOVEMBER 16 / REGIONAL - MID-ATLANTIC: Online Happy Hour, 7:30-8:30PM (ET). Join dramaturgs from your region to toast our successes, brainstorm solutions to our challenges, meet new people, and engage in resource sharing! We'll also discuss what LMDA can help support you and your work in the 2017-18 season. Open to members and prospective members. Bring a your favorite drink and join us on Zoom*, our new professional meeting and networking site. Questions? Reach out to Jacqueline Goldfinger, regional@lmda.org.

NOVEMBER 17 - DECEMBER 10 / REGIONAL - METRO BAY AREA: Metro Bay Area LMDA Partnership with Golden Thread Productions, ReOrient 2017 Festival of Short Plays. At Potrero Stage, San Francisco.

Think you know the Middle East? Think again. This biennial festival will turn San Francisco into a mecca for innovative, spirited, and thought-provoking theatre from and about the Middle East, welcoming artists who challenge the dominant depictions of the Middle East and audiences who seek unconventional and provocative programming. This year, Regional VP Nakissa Etemad is curating a partnership between LMDA & Golden Thread to provide local dramaturgs to work on publications, new play development, and research for the festival, and participate in a dramaturgy panel at the ReOrient Forum on Thanksgiving weekend. If you would like to get involved in ReOrient, please contact Nakissa at: metrobayarea@lmda.org. For more info and tickets, visit <http://www.goldenthread.org/2017-season/reorient2017/>

And look out for our dramaturgs' postings throughout November on the Golden Thread and LMDA websites!

REGIONAL - NORTHWEST: Regional VP Roxanne Ray is working with Geoff Proehl and John Wilson to plan an event in early 2018 in the Puget Sound area. Details to come mid-November. If you'd like to contact Roxanne to volunteer or share ideas, e-mail her at northwest@lmda.org.

REGIONAL - BUTTE/ROCKIES: Regional VP Heidi Schmidt is planning a winter happy hour in the Denver area to chat informally about dramaturgy in theory, dramaturgy in Denver/Boulder/Colorado in general, and about what LMDA can do for you. This event is open to anyone who identifies as a dramaturg – membership in LMDA will be discussed and promoted, but is not required at this point. If you'd like to contact her to volunteer or attend, email her at rockies@lmda.org.

REGIONAL - LMDA CANADA: Stay tuned for information in early 2018 about a one-hour online panel discussion revolving around Digital Dramaturgy. For more information, contact Regional VP Marie Barlizo at canada@lmda.org.

REGIONAL - THIRD COAST: Regional VP Skyler Gray is planning a luncheon event during the Alley Theatre's Alley All New Festival in January. Due to the hurricane, he will have more information for you later this winter. If you'd like to contact him to volunteer or share ideas, email him at thirdcoast@lmda.org.

**More about Zoom: A new corporate-level meeting site which gives us a direct, solid connection to one another online (no flakey free connection!). The screen will look like "The Brady Bunch" credit sequence so that we can both see one another and exchange ideas. It also offers a private chat feature to connect individually with one person in the group. To learn more about Zoom, watch this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFhAEoCF7jg>*

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